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ON PAGE **A1**

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U.S. Asserts Its Protest Is Not Aimed At Talks

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 22 — The United States said today that its protest over the Soviet Union's purported use of a possibly hazardous chemical to track the movements of Americans in Moscow was not intended to "sabotage" the summit meeting scheduled in November between President Reagan and Mikhail S. Gorbachev.

When they made the accusation on Wednesday, United States officials said there is a possibility that the chemical could cause cancer. The substance is nitrophenylpentadienal, a little-known substance also referred to as NPPD.

Reagan Administration officials asserted today that the accusation about the yellow powder was not deliberately timed to coincide with the announcement this week of American plans to test an anti-satellite weapon.

The Soviet Union, according to the Soviet press agency Tass, handed the State Department a protest that dismissed the charges as a ploy to further undermine United States-Soviet relations.

'We Intend to Proceed'

Charles Redman, a State Department spokesman, said "there is absolutely no United States attempt in any way to sabotage prospects for the Geneva meeting."

"We intend to proceed with that meeting," he said. "We intend to address the serious and far-reaching issues that exist between us and the Soviet Union."

The Soviet Union denied that it had used chemical agents on the staff of American agencies in the Soviet Union. It said the charge had been made as part of a plan for "poisoning the atmosphere in relations between our countries."

A senior State Department official said the United States would be monitoring to assure that use of the powder has been discontinued. The official said it was unclear whether the substance had been used in Leningrad as well as Moscow. He said American diplomats in both cities had been briefed on its possible dangers.

'Orchestrating' Is Denied

A State Department official who restated the accusations today said there was no link between the timing of the American announcements this week.

"These things were proceeding along several different tracks at the same time," he said. "There's a sensitivity that the Administration is putting on the boxing gloves when that isn't the case. We're not really capable of orchestrating something like this."

The series of statements on Soviet policy began Monday in a speech by Robert C. McFarlane, the President's national security adviser, to civic groups in Santa Barbara, Calif. He termed the Soviet Union's arguments on arms control a "masterpiece of chutzpah" and said warmer relations would not be possible without major changes in Moscow's policies.

The next day, the United States said it would proceed with the first American test of an anti-satellite weapon against an object in space, a move to which the Soviet Union objects.

Protest on Powder

Wednesday, the Reagan Administration said it was protesting the use of the powder "in strongest terms," and described the substance as one that has been found to cause genetic change and that therefore might be capable of causing cancer.

Today Mr. Redman reasserted the charge that the Russians have been using the substance, saying: "The evidence is there. We have absolutely no doubts in our minds that what we have described as happening has been happening."

But he said that "mutually beneficial" cooperation between the United States and Soviet Union was continuing and noted that John Block, the Agriculture Secretary, will leave Friday for a one-week trip to the Soviet Union. A spokesman for Mr. Block said the trip will involve talks about grain sales.

Malcolm Toon, the American Ambassador to the Soviet Union from 1976 to 1979, said today that during his tenure he had not been told of the use of the powder.

Senator David Durenberger, a Minnesota Republican who is chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said Wednesday that the United States has known of the powder since 1976 but had only recently learned of the possible health hazards from it.

Mr. Toon said that American officials had promised while he was Ambassador that he would be notified if there were any change in the "environment" surrounding the embassy.

During his tenure, he said, the Soviet Union bathed the American Embassy in microwaves in an apparent attempt to eavesdrop on conversations.

"I felt strongly that as Ambassador, I had to know everything that was going on," he said. "If this was going on and they didn't tell me, then I'm pretty mad about it."

A former official of the Central Intelligence Agency, George Carver, said that the Russians' use of the powder could have helped them track meetings of Americans with dissidents or agents.

But he said that in the late 1970's, the powder was considered of less concern than the microwave radiation.

"When a guy's beating you over the head with a shovel, you haven't got time to worry about being stuck with a needle," he said.

Dissidents Cited

Mr. Carver said the use of the powder could have reduced the number of people the Russians needed to maintain surveillance over American personnel in Russia.

"We have a lot of evidence of harassing of dissidents," he said, adding that "It could well be some of them were packed off because of evidence they had engaged in meetings with Americans they had been told to stay away from."

Late this afternoon, the American Foreign Service Association, the labor union that represents career Foreign Service employees in the State Department and the Agency for International Development, sent a letter to the State Department asking that the hardship pay for those serving in Moscow and Leningrad be raised to the highest level available.

Diplomats in Leningrad and Moscow presently receive a hardship-pay supplement equivalent to 20 percent of their normal pay. The supplement can be as high as 25 percent.